

NO SUCH THING AS REPETITION  
Jim Leftwich

## Don't Believe Everything You Think

I saw a bumper sticker the other day that read Don't Believe Everything You Think. I drive for a living, so I see a lot of bumper stickers. Most of them aren't worth thinking about. I don't think we know what a thought is. Sometimes we actively construct sequences and/or aggregates of thoughts. We address questions and problems:  $x$  is broken, how can it be fixed? why does  $x$  happen and not  $y$ ? what is  $x$ ? and how does it differ from  $y$ ?  $x$  is not not- $x$  ( $y$  quite possibly is not- $x$ ; let's think about that); if  $x$ , then  $y$ . We think we begin with the questions and/or problems, but this is another problem: we don't clearly begin anywhere. Sometimes thoughts appear, or sound, or both, unbidden. We find a fully-developed thought in our mind, present like an object. These thoughts often carry an aura of importance. They may seem profound, silly, profoundly silly, or simply banal, but all the same they almost shimmer with an unsought otherness, alien thoughts. The other day I was driving around Charlottesville, working, and it occurred to me — I was listening to jazz on the radio, not actively thinking about anything — that we live in the perfect world, that it could not be otherwise. Not a revelation, an epiphany, just a thought, but almost palpable, solid like an object in the mind. And not mine. I'm receptive to this kind of thinking, and I've encountered some of the traditions which state this kind of thing as fact, but I'm not under normal circumstances given to thinking like this, it's a difficult proposition to propose and then defend, as a concept it is a magnet for ten thousand refutations, only as a self-contained experience of and as thought does it seem to stand up at all. It's a hard thought to hold comfortably and clearly in the mind. I pulled over to the side of the street and scribbled a few notes in my notebook, hoping, I suppose, to get this down in words before I actively thought about it too much. Here are the notes: I sit in the car, listening to music, making these little drawings. Not drawings, really, little scribbled patterns. I fill the empty spaces with scrawls and scratches and mutated alphabeticals. I can't even ask if they are any good or not — the question doesn't make any sense. They are absolutely perfect examples of what they are. Everything is the absolutely perfect example of what it is. I am the absolutely perfect example of what I am. No way around it. Do what you like. I thought about this for a moment or two, knowing it was wrong: too much prior, too much projected, not nearly enough of the present, presence, of the actual thought, its moment in the mind. I made a few more notes: Uniqueness means perfection. Uniqueness is the

absolute condition of the universe and everything in it. What is it we want? Power? If so, we are fools. There is a man in Alabama, Tom Hendrix, who is making a wall. He's making it to honor his great-great grandmother. He's been working on it for fifteen years, missing only twenty-two days in that time. I guess he's an outsider artist, of sorts. An outsider earthworks artist. That's one way of thinking about what he does. He thinks he's involved in a kind of sacred ritual. His grandmother was a Yuchi Indian. At one point he was visited by an old Indian from South Dakota, Charlie Two Moons, who had seen a vision of the wall. Among other things, Charlie Two Moons told Hendrix that the Great Spirit was guiding him to build the wall. The wall does not belong to you, said Charlie Two Moons, you are merely its keeper. He warned Hendrix about visitors to the wall: They're going to come and they're going to say, Hey, Brother Tom, the wall is not perfect. It needs to be straightened out down there. You tell them, No, that wall is like your great-great-grandmother's journey through life. It's never straight. Last week I got a call from Ralph Eaton, an old friend who I hadn't seen in thirteen years. Not long into the conversation, he reminded me of a night in 1979 when we had taken mushrooms and gone to Vesuvio's in San Francisco. Among other things, we decided or discovered that the great secret in life was that God had made an enormous mistake in the creation of the universe. The consequence of this for humans is that it makes sense that it doesn't make sense.

4.19.01

#### Asemic Calligraphy

Phillipe Sollers: He who will not write shall be written.

I stay up until dawn just about every night. Lately, I've been going to bed around nine in the morning. The sun's coming up right now, seven o'clock. I work until two-thirty, three in the morning, and my wife usually goes to work at seven in the morning, so we spend a little time together while she wakes up and gets ready for work. One morning around dawn, after I'd been reading *This Is Not A Pipe* and thinking of how to make a kind of minimalist visual poetry that would require simultaneous reading and looking, would actually during the time spent with it eliminate the distinction between reading and looking, I went back to the bedroom and crawled in beside Sue. I'd been making corroded alphabeticals for years as a part of the *Staceal* series, and some of them seemed so corroded as to at least require a bit of simultaneous reading and looking, but, for the

most part, they were just lists or arrays of letters, and the actual reading required was minimal. Also as a part of Staceal, I had made a number of what I called "homophagic alphabeticals", letters which were almost entirely eaten away by duplicates whited-out and placed just slightly off-center and above them. Many of these consisted of single words or phrases, so there was a certain amount of reading required, and an equal amount of looking, of constructing from the barest of outlines, often broken outlines, the original letters. This seemed to fuse the act of looking with the act of reading. The words were images, and not in the same way, for example, that the large words on the sides of buses or on billboards are images. The words used in advertisements are almost always immediately recognizable as words, consisting of large bold letters very clearly formed. So, maybe I was onto something, or at least moving in that direction. I had been making a sort of quasi-calligraphic writing for a few years, and much of it seemed to consist of letteral forms, oddly torqued and fragmentary, but still very suggestive of letters (so much so that for a while in 98 and 99 I was trying to read them aloud, almost singing a modulated series of muffled growls, hisses, snorts). But be that as it may, these writings were hardly readable texts, they were more like eidetic images in which one might find traces and hints of letters if one were so inclined. When I first sent some of them to John Bennett, probably in 96 or 97, he called them "spirit writings". Tim Gaze published a chapbook of them that he called Spirit Writings. I remember the day I started doing them. One night, following Terence McKenna's directions, I had eaten five dried grams of stropharia cubensis and laid down in silent darkness. When I got up the next day, I went into town and bought a notepad and a pen. I sat in the car in the parking lot at Barracks Road Shopping Center and made pages and pages of these things, line after line of these indecipherable quasi-letteral writings. I wasn't sure what I was doing or why I was doing it; I had never done anything like it before. I remembered a postcard I had gotten from John Byrum a few years earlier on which he wrote, as a footnote referring to one of my rewritings of a Bennett poem, that the next step would likely be an entirely asemic writing. I hadn't seen the word before, but its meaning was clear enough. Sue rolled over beside me and said I wish I could read your mind. I had closed my eyes and was watching an array of torqued and corroded letter-forms slowly swirl and float as if in a void. I said, how much do you want to know about asemic calligraphy? The letter-forms looked like morphs of my corroded letter lists and my crayon calligraphy. I want to make this kind of image writing, these corroded, colored letter-forms softly swirling against a deep black background. Sue pulled back a little and said, you're

right, I would probably be disappointed. I want you to be thinking about me. I'm not sure I'm really all that concerned about the distinction between reading and looking. You don't want to read my mind, I said, you want to write it. More and more I find myself primarily interested in the difference between reading and writing.

4.19.01

### No One Has Ever Gotten Anything Right

No one has ever gotten anything right, and I'm not going to presume that now is the time to start. We always start with the man from Crete telling us all Cretans are liars; from there we venture more or less qualified means of evincing meaning. If I have gotten this right at the outset, and I think I have, something is seriously awry, amiss. I must have missed something, for something is certainly wrong. If Plato got any of it right, ideal eidolons all but absent in a cavernous dream, then it follows that all but the most tenuous and provisional of proposals will thenceforth always be at least a little off. So, even if I think he's right (and I do), I of necessity must begin thinking from a position which can only be assumed as if he is wrong. But the as if, as useful as it is, does not protect us from Descartes. It is all but impossible to assume a position stated as I think as if I am. Almost everything will protect us from philosophy, it's as if this is part of the grand design, but nothing outside the absence of a self will protect us from the plight of thinking. It occurred to me (or, more likely, it occurred to someone else and I am occluding my sources again) a while back that there are two fundamental problems for us in trying to think about being in the world. I'm not exactly thinking ontology and epistemology, but I think I'm thinking something pretty close to that. One of the problems is the problem of scale. We can't see what we're in because it's in us as much as we're in it. We need to step back a bit, but this is a little bit easier said than done. We need, at least for a little while, to be the bigger picture. Not just see it, be it. Be the bigger picture so we can see what a small part of it we always are. The other problem almost seems like a consequence of or conclusion drawn from the problem of scale, but I think it's actually an entirely different problem. The world, the universe, the things happening, are not here for us, are not happening for us. We're in it up to our ears, no getting around that, but it's not about us. Something is going on here, but just to say it is significant is to assert that it signifies us. It's a sign. We're the signified. It has nothing to do with us

as us is defined by us, and it has everything to do with us as something entirely other than ourselves as we usually define that word. We've known all this for a while now. But we don't act like we know it. More importantly, we don't think like we know it. Maybe under normal circumstances we can't think like we know it. Maybe rationality and language assume structurally that we are at the center of the universe. A few weeks ago I sent a copy of Things Rescued From Eternal Nonexistence to John Byrum. He sent back a postcard with a little note, part of which read: "do you think we have swallowed a big one?" Yes, I do think we have swallowed a right good sized one. But I'm still interested in things like what happens when I leave out the expected hyphen in the previous sentence. I'm as certain as I need to be that you read it as if the hyphen were there. I'm interested in the fact that I am able to write two conflicting things while intentionally refraining from writing one of those things. It shouldn't surprise us that no one has ever gotten anything right.

5.16.01

### Transition Probabilities

It is the spring of 1994. I am working with an address base that consists of 17 files, totalling 6021 addresses. I decide to condense the data into 3 files. All the addresses are UVA dormitory rooms, so there is no need to organize the files as I condense them. The addresses have been entered over a period of weeks, and each file contains between 300 and 400 addresses. I combine the first 6 files, creating a file containing 2033 addresses. I combine the next 6 files, creating a file containing 1994 addresses. When I combine the remaining 5 files, a file is created which contains 1994 addresses. This catches my attention simply because it seems improbable. It doesn't mean anything, there's no need for a bug-eyed "Wow!", it's simply a series of events and their outcomes. Synchronicity may simply be a quality of attentiveness wherein connectivities are noted regardless of their seeming significance or triviality. In 1978, Tommy Leaver and I were hitchhiking through northeastern Oregon. A man who called himself Brother Hepp picked us up and took us to his trailer in Waitsburgh, WA. We lived for a few weeks in a garage next to his trailer. Brother Hepp believed in an odd mixture of Pentecostal Christianity, southwestern Indian religions, and something like street mythology. He was blind in one eye, but he could throw a knife with pinpoint accuracy. He could stand in the Blue Mountains and point out

hummingbirds atop the blighted pine trees. He told us he picked us up because a voice told him to. One day we were sitting in his trailer talking about angels. Brother Hepp said he once was visited by the 18-foot tall angel Gabriel in that very trailer. The trailer might have been seven feet high. The large patterns remain the same, but the details change incessantly. If we don't pay attention to the details, there are certain things we will never see. If we attend too closely to the details, we might never suspect we are involved in a larger pattern. Thanksgiving, 1994. I'm talking with my brother-in-law about living in Charlottesville. He lived there with my sister in the early 70s. I've been working with my address base, adding residential addresses to the dormitory listings. The night before Thanksgiving I entered the listings for an apartment complex and a trailer park. My brother-in-law tells me about living in that apartment complex, then moving to that trailer park. It seems improbable, these aren't particularly student-oriented areas of town, and he was in Charlottesville to attend the university, so it gets my attention. These kinds of experiences don't add up, don't accumulate towards epiphany or revelation. They don't teach us anything specific or exact about what kind of world we live in or what we should do. Attunement is as trivial as it is transformative, probably transformative precisely because trivial. One day late in July of 78, I left the shed next to Brother Hepp's trailer, bought a 6-pack of beer, and went down to the Touchet River, sat on a smooth rock, sipped a few beers, watching the river flow. A beautiful day, just a few cumulus clouds floating in the vast blue sky. I was watching a cloud approach when it started to talk. It was talking about my future. Some of what it said was wrong, at least some of the details were wrong. For example, it said I would die in a car wreck in Missouri in the summer of 1998. That didn't happen. I died at home in Charlottesville, in January of 98.

5.17.01

Trust, Realaesthetik, and the Texture of a Stochastic Past

Yesterday someone at work handed me a section of an old newspaper so I could read an article about a restaurant owned by a man we used to work for. He's doing well, or at least he was a few weeks ago, when this newspaper was printed. The article rambled around a bit, talking about the one particular restaurant, about the history of restaurants in America, about various inventions that facilitated the growth of the restaurant

business (sliced bread, I discovered, was invented in 1928). This particular section of the paper included the horoscope. I read mine. It was, I suppose, at this point, doing something like forecasting the past, the mirror image of remembering the future: your friends do not have your best interests in mind.

I tried to remember what my friends were up to a few weeks ago. If I remember correctly, they were doing pretty much what everybody was doing, what everybody's friends were doing, which is doing stuff with their own best interests in mind. I think that's pretty much what I was doing a few weeks ago. Ralph Eaton called me a few weeks ago, I hadn't heard from him in years. It seemed like he wanted to talk. It seemed like a good thing at the time, still does. I'm not sure either of us had anyone's interests, good or bad, in mind. A few weeks ago, Scott MacLeod sent me an envelope unveiling his concept of Realaesthetik. One sheet reads: "Just came up with the word/concept which will either make me famous or make me deranged or both. You can have it too." The other sheet reads, among other things: "realaesthetik is an expansionist policy having as its primary principle the advancement of Scott MacLeod's interests." Since Scott and I share several interests, I take the announcement of Realaesthetik to be clearly with my best interests in mind.

If I took the horoscope as accurate information, what would I be able to do with it? How would I read it? At this point, it's not a warning advising me to take the necessary precautions, it's a sort of admonition reproaching me for not paying enough attention a few weeks back. Not only that: since I can't think of anything it could be referring to, it is a sort of reproach for not paying sufficient attention during the whole of the past few weeks. What it says, finally, is you missed it. It carves a hole in the center of my present that I will carry with me for the rest of my life. There was a moment in my life when something of significance was going on, and I missed it, but not only did I miss it, I know I missed it. It's over, gone forever, an absence in my life, and it will be present precisely as an absence for as long as I am alive.

It's a good thing I don't take these things as accurate information. In fact, I don't take the past as a whole as accurate information.

In the mid 70s, I was a DJ at the radio station where I went to college. Some friends of mine came down one weekend and brought some peyote with them. We cut the strychnine out, sliced up the caps, made a big spaghetti dinner and put them in it. A loaf of Italian bread that we didn't bother to slice and a few beers later, we wandered off to campus to do a radio show. It was a little more free-form than usual. We called ourselves



on the phone. We interviewed each other. Al Moreland posed as a history professor who read old newspapers as a way of searching for his roots. I've been thinking lately that I would like to do radio again. There are some slots available at the local college station. I would make a chronological list of artists from nine decades, starting with blues from the 20s and ending with new releases. The more arbitrary the list, the better. From Papa Charlie Jackson to US Maple, from Ishman Bracey to Michael Blake, a random mix. 20 artists from the 20s, 30 from the 30s, etc, so the show's content would be slanted increasingly towards the current. The best way to assemble the list would be to solicit it from a diverse group of friends and acquaintances. Keep my tastes out of this, I'm already all too familiar with them. Devise a numerical system by which a selection of artists might be made from the assembled list. Devise another numerical system to select specific songs by each artist, and another to determine the order in which they would be aired. The musical past would march inexorably, in clusters and gaps and arbitrary strings, into the swarming present, presenting a disjunct, cacophonous currency. Segue is a way of constructing seamless texture in sequenced musical selections. Disjunction is a way of presenting a different quality of musical sequencing. Stochastic selection from an arbitrary compilation might discern at different intervals either of the above. This is one way of constructing an appearance of natural texture. It is not all that different from mapping an old newspaper over the present.

5.17.01

Left to die

Carl André once said "Art is what we do. Culture is what is done to us." The statement has a value which is not diminished by the simple fact that it is wrong (by virtue of its being overly simplistic). I would like to advocate being wrong as a necessary and significant means towards the attainment of personal liberation and/or substantiation. Not that the ends justify the means, almost the opposite in fact: the means are the ends (it just takes a while for this to sink in). Take care of the present and there will be nothing you have not taken care of (it's impossible to argue with this, but go ahead). Someone has already said something similar to "culture is what we do art in". It's inescapable, granted, and we dismiss it at our peril (though courting such peril may be of some benefit), but perhaps we can distract it. It's a beast, sort of a small fry version of Robert

Hass's beast, and we can at least by analogy still take his advice and praise it, but let's be from the outset openly insincere: it's a despicable crock of dangerous horseshit and we all know it, but it's probably for the best that we don't spend too much time saying so. So, my recommendations as distractions are as follows: 1) make lots of noise; 2) tell lots of lies; 3) make ridiculous gestures; 4) overdo everything you do. The DemiGreat Beast will soon get sick of you and your silly antics and will almost surely ignore you (there's a small chance it will get angry and eat you, but no one said there were no risks involved in this). The other night I was listening to the radio and the DJ was playing excerpts from Neil Hamburger's *Left to Die in Malaysia*. Hamburger comes off as a minor character in a Beckett play who has suddenly and inexplicably been stranded center stage. It reminded me a little of *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead*, or maybe something somewhere between that and a play that consists of nothing but Lucky giving one long monologue. Not that Hamburger himself comes off as consistently delirious, but rather that the whole constructed scenario comes off as frighteningly preposterous and coolly insane (the sense one gets is similar to that mentioned by Jean Houston as her take on the theories of Terence McKenna: they're as delicious as they are delirious). Hamburger, though he may have taken stand-up comedy to one of its inevitable extremes, or maybe because he seems to have done this, has not been left to die in Malaysia (i.e., in the margins of the dominant culture), he has been left to die center stage right in the middle of the mainstream. It's a remarkable achievement. Richard Pryor set comedy on fire and sent it running down the street over twenty years ago and he was rewarded by being swallowed whole, eaten alive by the beast. (When I saw *In the Belly of the Beast* in Berkeley in 86, it was entertainment; now that's scary.) Everyone knows everything about Pryor, but who wrote *In the Belly of the Beast*? Who the hell is Neil Hamburger? My point exactly (or, more to the point, tangentially). To return to my original thoughts, which were about poetry and the concepts of the avant-garde and the experimental: when Mark Sonnenfeld says he's an experimental writer, I believe him. This from an interview: 3) "you claim the title 'experimental writer'. explain." "I experiment with thought and with language. This I do in print and on audio. I am always seeking out new methods and frequencies to write in. I like running tests. I feel there is no failure in a test, only another door that is revealed. There is a great deal one person can do if they so aspire. You need to unplug the television, give up the money factor, tune-out the hype, tune-in to yourself & your world and do your thing." If this is what an experimental writer does, I'm all for it. If this is what experimental writing is all about, then the

avant-garde should give up being the avant-garde and become experimental. This is the situation: left to die like obscure comedians in America, innovative poets have given up on what they do (eg., make poetry) and have embraced what is done to them (ie., culture as it is manifested in the more than just slightly absurd concept of an avant-garde lineage (the beast doesn't have to eat you if all your energies are engaged in the project of eating yourself)). The avant-garde is always last year's avant-garde. What we do (make poetry, make art, make selves, make worlds) is always happening now, one step ahead of everything, including us. No lineage and no future: praise it.

5.20.01

VUGG BOOKS 2007